

Toxics Cleanup Program Science Panel meets June 11

Ecology's Toxics Cleanup Program Science Panel will meet from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. June 11 at the University of Washington's Center for Urban Horticulture in Seattle. The meeting is open to the public. It will be in NHS Hall A, 3501 NE 41st St., Seattle.

For more information, please contact Martha Hankins at Martha.Hankins@ecy.wa.gov or 360/ 407-6864. The agenda and materials will be available prior to the meeting at http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/tcp/SciencePanel2009/SciencePanel_hp.html.

Change coming for wellhead elevation data submitted to Ecology

As of June 4, 2012, Ecology will require that all wellhead elevations submitted to the Environmental Information Management System (EIM) be referenced to the North American Vertical Datum of 1988 (NAVD88).

EIM uses wellhead elevations and depth to water measurements to calculate groundwater elevations across the state. In order to compare water level elevations, wellhead elevations must be surveyed or normalized to a common datum.

Ecology recognizes that many sites such as gas stations have commonly used a site-specific or "local" datum for wellhead elevations. A document has been created to help convert local datums to NAVD88. The document will soon be posted to the Ecology EIM Internet page.

Ecology seeks comments on scope of EIS for sediment standards

Sediments in areas of Puget Sound and in freshwater bodies throughout Washington are known to be contaminated with toxic substances such as petroleum-derived compounds, chlorinated organic compounds, and metals. Many contaminants are present at higher concentrations in sediment than in the associated water column because the contaminants do not dissolve easily and tend to adhere to sediment particles.

Most of the impacted sediments are located in productive near shore and estuarine areas where they pose risks to human health and the environment.

The state's Sediment Management Standards (SMS) have provided a solid foundation for making decisions to clean up and manage sediments throughout the state. Ecology has found that the SMS decision framework works well when making decisions based on acute and chronic ecological risks to the benthic community (sediment toxicity) in marine environments.

However, the current SMS rule does not work as well when making decisions at sites located in freshwater and/or where bioaccumulatives are chemicals of concern. Because of that, Ecology is revising the current SMS rule with these objectives in mind:

- Establish clear methods and policies for selecting sediment cleanup standards based on human health risks.
- Establish clear requirements for sediment cleanup standards at freshwater sediment sites by adopting biological and chemical criteria for the protection of freshwater benthic communities.
- Establish a clear path for reaching cleanup decisions and liability resolution that takes into account background concentrations and ongoing discharges.
- Update the procedures for synchronizing cleanup actions and source control requirements at sites where cleanup requirements are based on human health protection.

The State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) and SEPA rules requires that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) be prepared for proposed rulemaking with probable significant adverse effects on the quality of the environment. Ecology has determined that because of the controversial nature of the rulemaking and in order to provide as much information as possible to aid in decision making, an EIS would be necessary.

Ecology proposes to prepare an EIS to assess the impacts associated with Ecology's proposal to amend the SMS. The amendments define procedures for establishing cleanup standards and conducting cleanup actions for both freshwater and marine sediments, based on protection of both human health and the environment. The EIS will evaluate the potential adverse environmental impacts associated with implementing sediment cleanup actions under several alternate approaches.